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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHANGHAI 000408

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/CM AND DRL/IRF
NSC FOR WILDER, LOI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/22/2033
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: SHANGHAI HOUSE CHURCH LEADER SAYS OLYMPIC CLAMPDOWN TO
CONTINUE (C-AL8-01794)

REF: A. (A) SHANGHAI 360
[1](#)B. (B) SHANGHAI 384

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Beede, POL/ECON Chief, US Consulate
General Shanghai, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) A prominent Shanghai house church leader said local police clamped down on house church activity during the Beijing Olympics, and the increased scrutiny has shown no signs of abating in the month since the Games concluded. The leader stated that he believes the local government fears the rapid growth of house churches in Shanghai potentially threatens political stability. Many younger house church members would like to publicly register their organizations, he said, but government authorities are not prepared to admit the actual size of Shanghai's Christian population. Many Shanghai house church members traveled to Sichuan to offer assistance after the earthquake earlier this year, and house churches are growing even more rapidly in the countryside than in the cities. End Summary.

Local House Churches Weathering Olympic Clampdown

[1](#)2. (C) Shanghai's house churches were monitored closely by police during the recent Beijing Olympics, a prominent member of one of the churches told Poloff on September 19, and the authorities have shown no signs of discontinuing the clampdown in the post-Olympic period. Liu Ping, a professor at Fudan University and a member of the Xiaoyuan House Church, said the Shanghai Municipal Government appears to be increasingly concerned that house churches will begin to leverage their growing numbers into political power, and he claims that he has seen more visitors, who he claims are police officers posing as "insiders," at his church and in his religious studies classes at Fudan in the period immediately prior to, during, and after

the Olympics. (Note: Ref A details Liu's previous comments in July that house church leaders in several cities had reported increased government scrutiny because of the Olympics. End Note.)

13. (C) Liu said the government is particularly interested in the Xiaoyuan House Church for two reasons: (1) because of its rapid growth to approximately 500 members, who are split into 10 roughly equal groups for meetings on Sundays in different locations, and (2) the church has close relationships with other university and white collar churches in Shanghai at Tongji University, Shanghai University, and other organizations. As a group, these churches represent many of Shanghai's younger, middle class residents, and the government fears the churches could threaten political stability, particularly as Shanghai and its environs face a tougher economic outlook (Ref B).

Pros and Cons of a Registration Strategy

14. (C) In order to allay the authorities' concerns and hopefully legitimize the house church system, Liu said many house church members of his generation would like to register their churches with the local government. The registration strategy represents a break with the past, Liu said, when most underground Christians would prefer to remain anonymous. Many younger Christians believe current realities, however, dictate a new

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approach in order for the house churches to continue to grow.

15. (C) Ultimately, however, the house churches' rapid growth presents a challenge for their members, as local government officials would not be willing to acknowledge how many house church Christians are living in Shanghai, Liu said. Registering house churches also potentially would lead to a split between younger and older members, he said, as many older house church members continue to believe remaining underground is the right way to grow the church and stay out of trouble.

University Life: Facing Harassment at Work

16. (C) As a Christian, Liu said he is optimistic about the religion's growth on university campuses based on his own anecdotal evidence. Liu said when he first started teaching 10 years ago, there were only one or two professing Christians in a class of 100 students, but now there are "20 or so." The downside, Liu said, is that having more Christians in his classes raises the suspicions of university authorities who sometimes accuse Liu of proselytizing to his students. Liu told Poloff that he never discusses his own faith in class because he "knows the rules" but wryly observed that the "Buddhist professors never have this problem."

Christians in the Volunteer Network

17. (C) Liu said many Christians, including those from his house church, served as volunteers in Sichuan after the earthquake this spring. Shanghai house churches dispatched a number of volunteers to the earthquake zone, he said, as members were motivated by the overwhelming needs in the area. In response to Poloff's question about the number of Christians among the one million-plus volunteers at the Beijing Olympics, Liu said there may have been some Christians, but the prime motivation for Olympic volunteers was national pride rather than service.

House Church Growth in the Countryside

18. (C) Urban house churches are growing rapidly, but rural house churches are increasing at an even faster clip, said Liu, who is from rural Anhui Province (see also Ref A). Liu said people in the countryside want a better life, and since the Communist Party is not able to meet those expectations, rural residents are turning to religion to "find something better."

Comment

19. (C) Liu previously shared his views on house church development with Poloff in Ref A. His experiences during the Beijing Olympics and in the post-Olympic period provide additional insight into the current state of Shanghai house churches, but because it is hard to identify and openly talk with house church members, it is difficult to tell how representative his viewpoint is. Liu's comments, however, support the contentions made in Ref B that human rights activists and religious organizations in East China still are

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feeling the effects of Beijing's Olympic clampdown.

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JARRETT